

INTRIGUE IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Mystery Thriller Without Solution

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of the editorial page staff

A TRIAL that ended in Washington last week shed some light on—but failed to solve—one of this century's more fantastic real-life mysteries.

It is a mystery involving U.S. relations with one of the cruelest, bloodiest tyrants in hemisphere history: Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

A U.S. citizen, John Joseph Frank, 42, was convicted of acting illegally as an agent of Trujillo and sentenced to a federal prison term of from eight months to two years. He has appealed the verdict.



Frank

Frank is a onetime Georgetown university football star, a former FBI agent and an ex-employee of our top-secret central intelligence agency (CIA). If not overshadowed by bigger international events, his trial could have served the useful purpose of focusing U.S. attention on the amazing intrigues and undercover operations of Trujillo — not in Dominican territory but in the United States. But the grand jury that indicted Frank was seeking primarily to unravel this thriller.

THE STORY begins March 12, 1956, when Dr. Jesus Maria de Galindez, a Spanish-Basque scholar and teacher at Columbia university, disappeared in New York City without trace. He had been about to publish in book form his Columbia doctoral thesis, "The Trujillo Era," a devastating, documented account of life in the Dominican Republic, where he

had resided for seven years. It seemed obvious that someone wanted publication of the book blocked.

Later, a U.S. pilot, Gerald Lester Murphy, 23, told friends he had flown guarded "patient" he discovered to be Galindez in a rented plane from Amityville, L. I., to West Palm Beach, Fla., then on to the Dominican Republic March 12.

Murphy subsequently became a Dominican airlines pilot, but he, too, vanished Dec. 3, 1956, after quitting that job and preparing to return to the United States.

Later, under mounting U.S. pressure, the Trujillo regime produced this story: Octavio de la Maza, Murphy's Dominican co-pilot, hanged himself in a jail cell Jan. 7, leaving a suicide note. In it, de la Maza confessed he had killed Murphy and dumped his body into shark-infested waters off the Dominican coast.

The state department examined the note and called it a forgery.

FRANK'S TRIAL established the fact that he had carried out an investigation involving Galindez on Trujillo's behalf and submitted a bill for services and expenses.

The prosecution also established that Frank, using the alias of "John Kane," showed up at the Linden, N. J., airport March 6, 1956, to pay for rental of the plane Murphy flew to Florida six days later. In addition, prosecution produced telephone company toll slips indicating that Frank had talked with Murphy March 4, 6 and 7. Frank previously had said his only meeting with Murphy had been a casual one in a Ciudad Trujillo

A key witness was a U. S. air force sergeant, Harold L. French. He said he had been asked by his friend, Murphy, to go to Linden airport March 6 to help install additional fuel tanks on the plane to increase its flying range to 1,400 miles. There French had been introduced to "John Kane."

French also said that with Frank at the airport were Maj. Gen. Arturo Rafael Espallat and Felix Bernardino, both former Dominican consul generals in New York.

ANOTHER key witness was to have been Donald Jackson, a mechanic at a West Palm Beach airport. He declared earlier that he had refueled Murphy's plane March 12 and in doing so had seen an unconscious or lifeless body on a stretcher in the plane and had noticed a peculiar stench which he thought indicated use of a drug.

But six days before the start of the trial, Jackson and his father left in a private plane for a two-day trip to Texas. The plane crashed, both were killed. The FBI had no jurisdiction to investigate for possible sabotage.

Another key witness might have been the Amityville airport's night watchman, Anthony Frevele. He told his daughter and his relief watchman that an ambulance had come to the airport March 12 and a man "who could not move a muscle" had been put on Murphy's plane in a wheel chair.

But Frevele died of a heart attack in September, 1956. His account was therefore only "hearsay" evidence and could not be admitted.

STILL ANOTHER who might have been helpful

was a shadowy character long known in the underworld of the Americas as "El Cojo" (the lame one). He visited Galindez in November, 1955.

A Cuban acquaintance says he saw "El Cojo" in Miami March 1, 1956, and the lame one told him he had money from Trujillo to "do away with a professor in New York." But he then got a telegram saying, "Leave mission in abeyance. Return immediately." "El Cojo" left Miami for the Dominican Republic and has not been seen or heard from since.

Later, a Dominican girl friend of "El Cojo," Ana Gloria Viera, was found dead alone in a badly smashed car, though friends said she could not drive.

In November 1956, the police chief in Ciudad Trujillo, Salvador Cobian, was assassinated in his office. When he heard about it, Murphy told a friend: "My God! They've killed my protector."

These are the bare bones of this grisly mystery, which a federal grand jury in Washington is continuing to investigate.

MEANWHILE, for the first time in many years, Dictator Trujillo is showing genuine concern about the state of his relations with the United States, where previously he has always been able to count on powerful political and business friends.

His embassy and consulates are flooding newspaper offices with explanations, counterattacks and official biographies of the generalissimo. As is standard with hemisphere strong men, Trujillo blames his troubles on "Communists."

This time that line may be harder to sell—even if he did spend an estimated million dollars in this country.